

Official Minutes for Webb County Commissioners Court Special Meeting

Monday, February 22, 2005 at 1:00 PM

(Approved 03-28-2005)

Item No. 1 Call to order by Judge Louis H. Bruni

Let it be remembered that a special meeting of the Webb County Commissioners Court was held at 1:00 p.m. at the regular meeting place with the following members present to wit:

Louis H. Bruni	County Judge
Frank Sciaraffa	Commissioner, Pct. 1
Judith Gutierrez	Commissioner, Pct. 2
Jerry Garza	Commissioner, Pct. 3
Cynthia Brunner	Commissioner, Pct. 4

Thus constituting a quorum, the Commissioners Court proceeded to act upon the Agenda as posted in the meeting notice of the 18th of February 2005. Present also were Ms. Nora Elia Prado, Deputy County Clerk representing Mrs. Margie Ramirez Ibarra, Ex-officio Clerk of the Commissioners Court, various officers and others interested in the business of the Court.

Item No. 2 Roll Call – Margie Ramirez Ibarra, Webb County Clerk

Item No. 3 Pledge of Allegiance – Led by Judge Bruni

Item No. 4 Public Comment

Mr. Jose Luis Munoz was present to address Item No. 6. He stated that the Laredo Veterans Coalition was given the task of nominating one of the applicants for the position of Veterans Service Officer. He stated that their nominee was Mr. Tony Silva. He stated that the Coalition will understand that it is the court's ultimate decision as to who will be appointed as the Veterans Service Officer and that they will respect their decision and will work with them for the betterment of local veterans. He wished the appointee the best of luck, regardless of the choice made.

Mr. Luis Diaz De Leon was present to address Item No. 6. He stated that he was the elected chairperson for the Veterans Coalition. She stated that a meeting was held with all the candidates and voted on a recommendation for the position. He stated that he will respect the court's discussion and understands the court's difficulty in making this very important decision. He only asked that the court make the best decision for the veterans of Webb County.

Mr. Joe Rodriguez was present to address Item No. 6. He stated that he was a World War II veteran and a member of the American Legion Post 59. He stated that they recommend Mr. Mike Mendoza for the position of Veterans service Officer. He stated that they appreciated the Court's interest in veteran's affairs.

Mr. Jose Arnold was present to address Item No. 6. He stated that he was a World War II veteran and commander of the Veterans of Foreign War organization. He stated that they recommended Mr. Mike Mendoza due to his experience with veterans' affairs, which would make him a great Veterans Service Officer.

Mr. Carlos Meza was present to address Item No. 6. He stated that he was a member of the American Legion Post 59 and that their recommendation is the same as the last time. He stated that Commander Rodolfo Aguilar also backed their recommendation of Mr. Mike Mendoza. He stated that Dwayne Dean, Division Commander for 16 legions, also supported Mr. Mendoza's nomination. He stated that the veterans of Webb County will gain a lot of experience and knowledge by having Mr. Mendoza as the Veterans Service Officer.

Mr. Richard Chamberlain was present to address Item No. 6. He stated that he was the commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart. He stated that he has known Mr. Mendoza for many years and feels that he is the person for the job.

Mr. Luis Landin was present to address Item No. 6. He stated that this was a very important position and that he has known Mr. Mendoza for over twelve years. He stated that Mr. Mendoza has worked for several years to certify Veterans Service Officers and has over 35 years experience in Veterans affairs.

Mr. Rogelio Macias was present to address Item No. 6. He stated that all veterans earned the right to be treated with honor, pride and respect. He stated that they deserve the best services and support that there is. He stated that Mr. Mendoza has over thirty years experience working with veterans' affairs and the Veterans Administration. He stated that he has extensive knowledge in the needs of veterans.

Mr. Abraham Rodriguez was present to address Item No. 6. He stated that Mr. Mendoza has served the veterans for over thirty years. He stated that he has worked with, trained and certified Veterans Service Officers for the Veterans Administration. He stated that he has shown his commitment to veterans and has the education necessary to deal with the extensive issues pertaining to veterans' needs. He urged the court to cast their vote for Mr. Mike Mendoza

Item No. 5 Communications

There were no communications made.

Item No. 6 Formal interview by the Commissioner's Court of applicants for the position of Webb County Veteran Service Officer with discussion and

possible action to appoint one from among them for the same, to set salary therefore, and any other matters incident thereto

Cmr. Sciaraffa motioned to begin the interviews of the applicants, asking the following questions to all:

1. Please describe your service in the United States Military, education, and work experience.
2. This position requires considerable understanding of statutes, regulations, guidelines, and procedures relating to governmental assistance for veterans, their dependents, and their survivors. How does your education and experience qualify you to coordinate and supervise the veteran's administration process?
3. The Veterans Service Office handles confidential and privileged information. How you would maintain the integrity of this office in regards to this type of information?
4. The Veterans Service Officer must maintain effective working relationships with all County Officials, department heads, governmental jurisdictions, veterans, veteran's dependents, various veteran organizations and the general public. Please describe how you would create and maintain these relationships.
5. If you are selected for this position, what would your primary goals and objectives be for the Webb County Veterans Service office?
 - a) What are your plans to unite the local veterans' organizations and what approach will you use?
(Motioned by Cmr. Sciaraffa and seconded by Cmr. Gutierrez. Motion carried 5-0 by unanimous consent.)
 - b) Why are you leaving your current position?
(Motioned by Cmr. Sciaraffa and seconded by Cmr. Garza. Motion carried 5-0 by unanimous consent.)
 - c) Are you willing to relocate to Laredo if you do not currently live here?
(Motioned by Cmr. Sciaraffa and seconded by Cmr. Gutierrez. Motion carried 5-0 by unanimous consent.)

Mr. Nathan Bratton, Assistant County Attorney, advised the court of his concern regarding the asking of additional questions to the applicants. He recommended that the court have a second round of questions after the initial interviews or to make a motion to include the follow-up questions as part of the interview process. The following questions were motioned on and approved by the Court and were asked to all applicants in addition to the questions shown above.

1st Applicant – Mr. Mike Mendoza

5. Mr. Mendoza stated that his primary goal would be to make sure that everyone who qualifies for services receives them. He stated that there are a lot of services

that need to be brought to Laredo and that he would work in bring them here. He stated that he has a good association with the veteran's hospital in San Antonio and hopes that this will help him in bringing those services.

a) Mr. Mendoza stated that he would work at uniting the organizations. He stated that there are over 7,000 veterans in Webb County and numerous veterans' organizations that argue with each other instead of working together for the betterment of veterans. He stated that without a united front, nothing can happen. He stated that he will make presentations to the local groups about the different services available to the veterans. He stated that he has spoken with the commanders of the different veterans' organizations, including the Veterans Coalition and is looking forward to working with them on local veteran issues. He stated that he would make himself available to all the local organizations equally and would do everything he could for all the organizations.

2) Mr. Mendoza stated that there are only six levels within the Veterans Administration and has stated that he has working within all six levels during his years working with the Veterans Administration. He stated that he has not only working in the field but has trained and certified Veterans Service Officers for the State of Texas.

3) Mr. Mendoza stated that there is nothing currently in place to secure the confidential and privileged information in the office. He stated that if he is appointed, he has a program in mind that would help secure the information.

1) Mr. Mendoza stated that he served in the United States Airforce for 10½ years. He stated that for four years, he dealt with death notifications and veterans services. He stated that he has also worked for over twenty seven years in all levels of the Veterans Administration. He stated that he has over 118 college hours and has a degree in Business Administration. He stated that he would make himself available for speaking arrangements for the entire community as well as work with department heads and elected officials in order to better help the veterans.

b) Mr. Mendoza stated that 60-70% of his workload is from Webb County. He stated that by relocating to Laredo, he will be able to devote more time to the residents of Webb County. He stated that he would be quitting his current job but rather retiring from the Veterans Administration. He stated that of over 7,000 veterans in Webb County, only 40% receive any services. He stated that the need for assistance in Webb County is astronomical.

c) Mr. Mendoza stated that he currently lives in San Marcos with his wife and two daughters and commutes to San Antonio. He stated that he has already signed a contract with a local realtor for assistance in purchasing a home in Webb County.

2nd Applicant - Mr. Ricardo Ortiz

3) Mr. Ortiz stated that there are different levels of confidentiality that need to be considered. He stated that the paperwork needs to follow proper channels in order to maintain privacy and confidentiality.

5) Mr. Ortiz stated that he would work to make the office more accessible to the public and work with the various veterans' organizations in Webb County. He stated that he would also provide support and assistance to the veterans of Webb County.

a) Mr. Ortiz stated that he would identify what veterans' services were needed in Webb County and work with the veteran's organizations to find solutions to common goals.

2) Mr. Ortiz stated that he needed to determine what the needs were for local veterans.

1) Mr. Ortiz stated that he has lived in Laredo for over thirty years but was born in Monterrey. He stated that he served in the Marines for three years. He stated that he has continued his education by taking college courses required for a degree in Business Administration. He stated that he is knowledgeable in the needs of veterans from when he worked with the Veterans Administration.

b) Mr. Ortiz stated that he has always wanted to help the community and has seen the need for veterans' assistance. He stated that as a veteran himself, he knows the types of assistance that veterans need as well as the difficulty in obtaining some of those services.

4) Mr. Ortiz stated that he would work with all the department heads and offices necessary to get the necessary veteran services.

c) Mr. Ortiz stated that he would be willing to relocate or commute from Rio Bravo.

3rd Applicant – Mr. Antonio Silva

5) Mr. Silva stated that his primary goal would be to inform all Webb County veterans of the services available through this office as well as other offices. He stated that he would work to help all the veterans along with their families as much as possible and get as many benefits for as many veterans as possible.

a) Mr. Silva stated that there is a lot of animosity among the local veterans' organizations. He stated that he would visit with all the veterans' organizations as well as use the Laredo Veterans Coalition to unite these organizations.

2) Mr. Silva stated that the staff would need to be trained by the Veterans Administration but he doesn't feel that this would slow down the services given to the veterans.

- c) Mr. Silva stated that he would help the veterans to the best of his ability.
- b) Mr. Silva stated that he works with the Veterans Coalition and stated that he has also worked with Ms. Betty Mendoza in the past. He stated that he feels that this is a good way to help the veterans and advise them of the benefits available.
- 3) Mr. Silva stated that everything done in this office needs to be confidential and every case should be taken on a one-to-one basis.
- 1) Mr. Silva stated that he is a Vietnam veteran and served with the Army. He stated that he knows what war is like and the emotions that veterans feel when they return from the war. He stated that he has a repertoire with war veterans since he can sympathize with what they have gone through.

Judge Bruni called for a short recess.

RECESS (3:17 pm to 3:30 pm)

Judge Bruni thanked the applicants for their interest in becoming the Veterans Service Officer. He stated that they were all very qualified. He stated that it was very sad that there was so much division among the veterans' groups and he urged whoever was appointed to work with the veterans' organizations for the betterment of area veterans.

Judge Bruni motioned to appoint Mr. Antonio Silva as the Webb County Veterans Service Officer. Cmr. Cortez-Brunner seconded the motion.

The court clarified that the salary would be \$40,000 annually and included a \$88,734 budget and the appointment would be effective immediately.

Cmr. Gutierrez stated that the veterans were listened to regarding their needs and stated that the decision process is not easy. He stated that there were very good applicants and deserve congratulations and appreciation.

Motion carried 5-0 by unanimous consent.

Item No. 7 Adjournment

Cmr. Sciaraffa motioned to adjourn the meeting. Cmr. Gutierrez seconded the motion.

Motion carried 5-0 by unanimous consent.